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A typological approach to the analysis of poverty, based on selected characteristics of family structure, is suggested since the family unit is a concrete or actual structure in society, and much of the research and many of the action programs of the war on poverty have implicitly invoked some concept of the family. The typology of family structure suggested involves 4 dimensions: (1) family life-cycle, (2) membership composition, (3) completeness, and (4) sex of head. Data from a field study of 809 low-income families are included to indicate that this typology can be effectively operationalized. A 5 by 7 or 35-cell table of types of family structure, and informative footnotes conclude the document. (SW)

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A FAMILY STRUCTURE APPROACH TO THE ANALYSIS OF POVERTY

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One of the most important factors confronting those persons concerned about the conditions of poverty in the United States is the delineation of various forms or types of poverty that exist. Without some delineating typology, programs aimed at alleviating or eradicating poverty would be difficult to develop and perhaps impossible to implement.

A typological approach to the analysis of poverty, based on selected characteristics of family structure, is suggested here since it is this writer's contention that family structure variables are highly relevant to poverty and can provide a parsimonious approach to its alleviation.

The rationale for this position is as follows. First, the family unit is a concrete or actual structure in society. It is casually observable and, as Marion Levy states, it is a "focal point for social structures in general."[1/]

Families are unquestionably relevant to social theory and have been referred to frequently in the literature on poverty. However, there is a paucity of studies dealing directly with the family unit. A casual overview of several source bibliographies of poverty studies reveals remarkably few titles categorized under the heading "Family" and most of these are written from a psychological or social welfare perspective. The sociologists have seemingly defaulted here.[2/]

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In contrast, there has been a considerable amount of research undertaken in terms of categories produced by the simple cross-classification of poverty linked variables (e.g. age, education, family size, and income). While this approach may have been justified in the early stages of the war on poverty, it has at least two weaknesses which warrant its replacement. First, the contingency approach does not offer much opportunity for developing meaningful generalizations about people in poverty since there is little uniformity in the combinations of variables used or in the class limits of those variables. Second, the categories have no structural concreteness. They are merely statistical categories which are not casually observable, and have little social reality. Any action programming done in terms of these categories would be difficult if not completely unwieldy. For example, in a given study a category of persons who are male, over 35, with less than 12 years of schooling, may have some degree of analytical relevance within that particular study. However, the probability of finding another study using the same variables with the same class limits is rather small. (This problem could be corrected through the use of standardized categories but chances are that it won't be.) Furthermore, any action programming done in terms of such a category might find it difficult to sort out persons within this category. And even if it could delineate a target group, it would attack only a segment of the problem. Many persons who are functionally interrelated with those in the target group may be passed by. A more comprehensive approach is needed.

The second reason for suggesting a family structure approach for poverty analysis is that much of the research and many of the action programs of the war on poverty have implicitly invoked some concept of the family without actually coming to grips with it. For example, the current definitions of poverty are based on family size and family income and the family is often the unit of enumeration in survey research projects.[3] If the importance of the family is implicitly recognized and if it can be accepted that the family is a focal point for social structures in general (Levy's proposition is accepted here), then there may be a degree of efficacy in operationalizing poverty research explicitly in terms of family structure. The family then could serve as "a common denominator" for integrating poverty research and for coordinating a wide range of action programs to alleviate poverty.

THE DIMENSIONS OF FAMILY STRUCTURE RELEVANT TO POVERTY ANALYSIS

A typology as it is used here is a "purposive, planned selection, abstraction, combination, and (sometimes) accentuation of a set of characteristics with empirical referents that serve as a basis for comparison of empirical cases."[4] One difficulty in any typological procedure lies in the selection and combination of characteristics of the phenomenon being typed. In this paper the problem is to select those characteristics of family structure which are relevant to the incidence and intensity of poverty and which will yield a parsimonious number of types that are operationally feasible in terms of both research and action programs.

It must be recognized, however, that such a typology cannot account for every variation in family structure. Rather, the intent is that it should account for those types of family structure that occur most frequently and are most significant with respect to the existence of poverty. By delineating the most significant forms of family structure, however, the deviant cases (that is, those not accounted for by the typology) are brought into focus in such a way that they are more amenable to analysis. In short, a typology can delineate not only those cases which fall within its own conceptual scheme, but also those which were not originally accounted for. Insofar as the typology thus reduces the complexities of the phenomenon being investigated, it is useful; however, it must be recognized that any typology is subject to change in the light of empirical data. The typology to be presented here is suggested as a starting point. (See Figure 1)

The Nuclear Family-Extended Family Dimension

The most basic distinction to be made in differentiating types of family structure relevant to poverty analysis is the distinction between nuclear family forms (a male and/or female with their children) and non-nuclear forms which imply some type of extended family. It is recognized here that those family structures which are non-nuclear will not have a homogeneous composition since there are many variations in extended family structures. However, the nuclear family represents a structure that has a unique composition. Furthermore, this is considered to be the most typical form of family structure in American society and indeed in all relatively modernized societies.[5/]

The nuclear-extended distinction is relevant to the analysis of poverty primarily because of its implications for the social and economic dependencies and interdependencies which exist among family members. In the nuclear form, the dependencies are by definition among husband, wife and children; however, these dependencies and interdependencies become more complex in the extended form because of the increases in combinations and permutations of relationships that may occur. Because of the more complex nature of these social and economic interdependencies in the extended family, it is expected that a family's needs and wants, and the means for satisfying them, would also be more complex. For example, there are ecological and psychological conditions which may be more pervasive in the extended family situation. Problems of crowding and personal privacy are to be expected more frequently here and a wider range of interpersonal conflicts may exist. Furthermore, in this situation the development and socialization of children is subject to more diverse influences than in a nuclear family.

This is not to say that an extended family structure is necessarily a negative factor or a weaker type of family organization with respect to avoiding, coping with, or escaping from poverty. There may be certain strengths in such a family structure which can be exploited in poverty programs. For example, Riessman points out that, among the Negro poor a new family pattern has evolved to meet the threat of job instability and insecurity among Negro males. This is the "female based extended family structure in which mother, grandmother, aunts and other members of the larger family band together to share the responsibilities of home management, child rearing and earning a living."[6/]

A careful assessment of the relative strengths and weaknesses of both nuclear and extended families is necessary before any program recommendations can be made.

The Conjugal-Broken Dimension

A secondary distinction within the nuclear type of family delineates those families having both a male and a female member heading a family procreation--the conjugal form--and those families having only one member of a former conjugal pair--the broken form.[7] This distinction is highly relevant to poverty analysis since the absence of one parent may result in economic hardship and numerous social and psychological problems.[8] However, the conjugal aspect becomes somewhat less important in the extended family since there will usually be more than one adult present who may serve as a parental surrogate and compensate socially, economically, and psychologically for a missing natural parent. Therefore, this secondary distinction will not be used in reference to the extended family form.

The Sex of Family Head Distinction

Within the nuclear-conjugal and nuclear-broken classifications, one further distinction will be made. This distinction is the sex of the head of the family.[9] It makes quite a bit of difference whether the head of the family is male or female, particularly in the nuclear-broken classification. In this case, if the head is the remaining male parent, there are ramifications concerning the care and development of the children in the absence of a female parent. On the other hand, if the head of a nuclear-broken family is the remaining female member of

a former conjugal pair, there may be a problem of providing for the family financially in addition to providing them with the care and attention they need.

The sex of family head classification will be used for the nuclear-conjugal families as well as for the nuclear-broken type, although the reasons for its use are different. In American society, as in many others, there is a strong ethic that the head of the family should be a male. In those cases where a female is designated as the head of the family (either by herself or by other members of the family), a deviant type of family structure exists which may have implications for the study of poverty and solutions thereto. For example, if the male member of a conjugal pair is physically or mentally incapacitated, the burdens of family functioning may fall to the female member and she may be recognized as the head. Thus, she may have the same problems as the remaining female member of a broken relationship in addition to the problems of caring for a disabled spouse. There is also the situation referred to by Riessman where families become maternally oriented in order to cope with oppressive socio-economic conditions.[10/] Therefore, this distinction may provide clues to important factors related to poverty.

The Horizontally Extended-Vertically Extended Dimension

With respect to the extended family form, the secondary distinction will refer not to conjugality but the direction of the extension or proliferation of membership. Extended families can be proliferated vertically, horizontally, or in both directions. That is, the relationships among the members may be vertical from generation

to generation through at least three generations or the relationships may proliferate horizontally among members of the same generation. A typical vertically extended family would consist of a man and wife, their children, and their children's spouses plus any grandchildren. A typically horizontally extended family would consist of a man and wife and their children, plus any brothers or sisters who may have spouses and children of their own. An extended family proliferated in both directions would consist of combinations of the above. Thus, it has a rather unpredictable composition with respect to the specific relationships among its members. However, it is precisely because of this lack of unique and highly specifiable composition that this form of family structure must be set apart for analysis.

The horizontal-vertical distinction is relevant to poverty analysis because it indicates the presence or absence of various categories of family members who may be assets or liabilities to the family in both the economic and social sense. In the case of the vertically extended family, the probabilities of younger children and elderly adults both being present is extremely high.[11] Thus, the needs of the vertically extended family and the social and economic demands on its members are considerably more complex than those of a horizontally extended family where there is little likelihood of both elderly adults and non-adult children being present.

The vertical-horizontal distinction also is relevant to the strengths that the family may have resisting poverty. The vertically extended family with its older adults in addition to the parents of the children in the family may provide greater opportunities for multiple wage earners in the family since both parents may be freed of

the daytime care of children if there is a grandparent or other older adult who can be a full-time babysitter.

The horizontally extended family presents some intriguing problems. In families having younger children, it would be expected that all adults in the family would be of working age since only two generations may be represented in this type. Thus, there may be no built-in babysitter. If the adults other than the head and his (or her) spouse are employed, the question of whether or not they contribute to the financial maintenance of the family arises. If they do not, why are they permitted to remain in the family? If they do help support the family, why do they do it rather than form an independent unit of their own? How is the responsibility of the family toward them defined? Does it create tensions and demands which may lead to a disintegration of family structure and further economic hardship on at least some of the family members?

Questions such as these are probably easier to reconcile in the case of a vertically extended family than for a horizontally extended family due to the cultural ethic of mutual responsibility toward members of another generation. In short, it is anticipated that there may be differences in the type of membership bonds between horizontally and vertically extended families which have implications for (1) the incidence of poverty among these types of family units, (2) for the ability of the family to cope with poverty conditions, and (3) for social and psychological resources which can be used to advantage in programs aimed toward the eradication of poverty.

The Family Cycle Dimension

The final dimension of family structure to be delineated here involves the stages of the cycle that a family goes through from the time that a conjugal relationship is formed until the family is dissolved in the departure of the children from the family environs and ultimately the death of the conjugal pair. Such a family cycle concept has been used repeatedly to describe the developmental process of the family and to infer a relative age dimension for both parents and children without making an absolute distinction in terms of chronological age.[12/]

There is, however, some difficulty in using the family cycle concept for the purpose at hand. This difficulty, inherent in all typological analyses including previous efforts using the family cycle, involves the problem of operationally defining or delineating useful analytical stages of the cycle. Previous research using the family cycle concept has not provided much agreement as to how many stages there are or how they are to be defined. Since the development of the family is a dynamic process, any imposition of static analytical stages has a high degree of arbitrariness; and the only criteria that can be invoked in the delineation process are operational feasibility and heuristic value. These criteria will be invoked here.

In most previous research using the family cycle concept, a new stage was delineated when the family entered a new phase such as the birth of the first child, entrance of the eldest child into school and the departure of the first child from the family. With respect to the analysis of poverty, however, it may be more efficacious to focus

on those factors which impose limitations or demands on the time, attention and finances of the family members than to focus on the developmental sequence per se. For example, the departure of the first child from the family may in one sense represent a distinct juncture in the development of the family; but if there are three children of school age remaining at home, the limitations and demands on their parents are not eliminated and perhaps only slightly reduced. However, with the departure of the last child, the parents may have more freedom and greatly lessened social and economic responsibilities.

Although the operational definition of stages of the family cycle may vary depending on the exact formulation of specific research projects, a series of general stages is suggested here as follows:

I. Pre-children stage
II. Pre-school children stage
III. School children stage
IV. Mature children stage
V. Empty nest stage

The first stage, the pre-children stage, refers to the situation that results when a conjugal relationship is formed but before any children are born or brought into the family by adoption or other sponsorship. This stage may last only a short time or it may last for a considerable portion of the lifetime of the conjugal pair if they never have any children.[13/] However, this stage can apply only to nuclear-conjugal families or horizontally extended families for the following reasons: (1) If the members of a conjugal pair are separated by death, divorce, or mutual agreement before any children are brought into the family, they would revert to the status of unattached or single individuals. Thus, a continuing conjugal relationship is

necessary for the existence of the pre-child stage in that it implies the expectation or at least the possibility of children being brought into the family either by natural birth, adoption, or other sponsorship; (2) The vertically extended family implies the existence of a third generation and since the existence of a third generation means that two generations have had children, the unit as a whole cannot be in a pre-child stage.

Pre-School Children Stage

The presence of pre-school age children in the family is particularly useful for delineating a stage in the family cycle. During the time that there are pre-school children in the family, the need for maternal care and supervision is high. The child's environment at this time also has a tremendous effect on his physical and mental development with implications for his future ability to cope with the outside world. Thus, families with pre-school children face unique problems in providing for the physical as well as the social and psychological needs of their children. To the extent that these needs are met among those families in poverty, the occurrence of intergenerational poverty may be avoided. When they are not met, one might expect continued poverty at least one generation into the future. If programs can be focused on this particular type of family to assist the parents in meeting the needs of their pre-school children, progress can hopefully be made toward alleviating poverty.

School-Age Children Stage

The needs and wants of the family change as the family moves into the school-age children stage and by the time all of the children

in the family have entered school, the social and economic demands on the parents will have changed considerably from those in effect when even one pre-school child is in the family. The mother may be freed to take a part-time job or even a full-time job since the children require less personal supervision and can begin to assume some of the responsibilities for the functioning of the family unit. This is not to say that the needs and wants of the family decrease or increase at this time but rather that they create a different situation. However, it may be desirable to determine which needs increase or decrease and to ascertain the magnitude of such changes.

In reality, there is, of course, a transitional period when there may be both pre-school and school-age children in the family and this transitional period in itself may be the subject of investigation. However, in the present conceptual framework, the presence of pre-school children is viewed as a limiting factor and until this limiting factor completely disappears, the third stage of the family cycle cannot be said to occur.[14/]

Mature Children Stage

The fourth stage of the family cycle to be delineated here is the mature children stage which occurs when all children have left secondary school but have not left the family environs. When the last child leaves secondary school, there is a relatively distinct juncture in the development of the family. Children are expected to assume greater responsibility for their own economic and social needs at this time, thus relieving the parents of at least some of the responsibility.[15/]

Empty Nest Stage

The mature children stage may be somewhat shorter in duration than the previous stages since it is somewhat transitional in nature. In American society, it is generally expected that a child become socially and economically independent of his family and that this independence be manifested by his leaving home eventually to either form a family of his own or become an independent single individual. Therefore, most families deteriorate until only the original conjugal pair (or perhaps only one member of the pair) remains. When this point is reached, the fifth and final stage, often referred to as the "empty nest," comes into being.

Since the empty nest stage refers only to those families who have had children who eventually departed leaving only the conjugal pair or remaining member thereof, it cannot be applied to vertically extended families. The vertically extended family by definition has children present who belong to some member of the family. However, it is possible to have a horizontally extended family at the empty nest stage if siblings or other relatives live together as a family unit after their children have departed.

THE TYPOLOGY OF FAMILY STRUCTURE

The final consideration of this paper is a presentation of a typology of family structure based on the family structure variables previously discussed.

If the stages of the family cycle are cross-classified against the nuclear-extended dimension and the further discriminations under

it, a five by seven or 35 cell table of types of family structure emerges. (See Figure 1.) However, some of these cells are null by definition. As was pointed out in the discussion of the pre-child stage of the family cycle, the nuclear-broken, vertically extended and two-way extended categories are irrelevant to the pre-child stage since these represent "types" that could not possibly occur in reality. The empty nest stage is also irrelevant to the vertically and two-way extended categories since these categories by definition refer to multi-generation families and the empty nest stage implies the presence of only one generation. The elimination of these six null cells leaves a total of 29 empirically possible types of family structure.

Data from a sample of 809 low-income families in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania were used to test the feasibility of the typology presented here. The four characteristics of family structure previously discussed (membership composition, completeness, sex of head of family cycle) were operationalized for computer analysis of the 809 cases. The results of this analysis are presented in Figure 1. All but 53 of the 809 cases were classifiable using the specifications of the characteristics previously described. Thirty-one of the 53 cases were rejected by the computer because of data or programming ideosyncracies (e.g. misspelled words in the data bank) and were classified by hand. This left only 18 cases or slightly more than two percent which were not accounted for by the typology.

Of these 18 unclassified cases, eight were single, separated, widdowed or divorced individuals living alone. Since technically there is no family structure involved in these cases, they were not expected to fall within the typology. An additional nine of the 18

unclassified families were middle-aged family heads with dependent parents. Structurally, they might have been classified in one of the mature children categories, but functionally, they more nearly resemble those cases that fall into the empty nest categories. Rather than unduly compromise the typology, the decision was made to view these cases as a deviant category until they are used in a more specific analysis.

Only one case out of the original 809 was considered to be too ambiguous to classify. It consisted of a separated female head with three children plus another separated female friend who had one child. This might be considered as two nuclear-broken-female head families but the degree of social kinship involved might cause it to function as one unit. Without additional information, no classification decision could be made.

Two other groupings of cases which the computer failed to classify deserve mention here. There were eight cases of elderly heads of families who had elderly "friends" living with them. These were included in the empty nest categories since they may be viewed as family units on the basis of social kinship. There were also six cases of children living with their grandparents but with no parents present. This is a sort of "skipped generation" extended family since it spans three generations, but it probably functions as a nuclear family unit and closely resembles the nuclear unit structurally. Therefore, these cases were classified in the appropriate nuclear family categories.

No attempt has yet been made to utilize this typology in the analysis of poverty and in this sense, its ultimate utility has not been demonstrated. However, it has been demonstrated that the typology can be operationlized and that it is relatively exhaustive in its ability to categorize the cases in the data used here.

Summary

This paper has set forth a typology of family structure suggested as useful in the analysis of poverty. The typology is based on four dimensions of family structure: (1) family life-cycle, (2) membership composition (nuclear-extended), (3) completeness (conjugal-broken) and (4) sex of head. The suggested conceptual framework is predicated on the facts that (1) family structure is referred to, at least implicitly, in a great many poverty studies but has not been adequately explicated and (2) families are concrete or actual components of society; thus, they represent a common denominator for unifying the study of poverty conditions and coordinating a wide range of action programs. It is also argued that the typology presents a more viable theoretical basis for research and a more observable unit for action programming than the common statistical categories based on selected poverty linked variables. Data from a field survey of low income families in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania indicate that this typology can be effectively operationalized.

Figure 1. Typology of Family Structure

Stage of Family Cycle	Nuclear Families: Conjugal: Male Head	Nuclear Families: Conjugal: Female Head	Nuclear Families: Broken: Male Head	Nuclear Families: Broken: Female Head	Extended Families: Horizontally Extended	Extended Families: Vertically Extended	Extended Families: Two-Way Extended	Total
Pre-children	8	0			0			8
Pre-school children	162	5	1	18	1	13	0	200
School children	52	3	0	23	2	11	1	92
Mature children	81	4	8	50	3	27	0	173
Empty nest	120	7	55	112	24			318
Total	423	19	64	203	30	51	1	791

Single, widdowed, separated, divorced persons living alone	8
Empty nest stage head with elderly parent	9
Non-classifiable	1

Footnotes

1/ Levy, Marion J., Modernization and the Structure of Societies, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1966, p. 384.

2/ See Schlesinger, Benjamin, Poverty in Canada and the United States, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966.

Paltiel, Freda L., Poverty: An Annotated Bibliography and References, Ottowa: The Canadian Welfare Council, 1966.

3/ The more inclusive term, household, is often used rather than family. It is a more flexible term in that it makes no presumptions about the kinship, or lack of it, among persons living together. However, it is precisely this lack of specification that is at issue here. Nearly all "households" are expected to have some element of family structure. That is, there is only a small proportion of households which have no biological kinship among two or more members of the household. Furthermore, persons in the household who are not biologically related to other members may function as family members. They have as Levy (see Levy, op. cit., p. 423) puts it "social kinship" and for purposes here would be considered as members of a family unit. To avoid accusations of label changing, let me point out that the family unit, defined as a group of persons having social or biological kinship residing together in a single domicile, is still not synonomous with household. Unattached, unrelated individuals (boarders, servants, etc.) residing with a family unit can constitute a household, but it is maintained here that this is not the most relevant or useful unit for the analysis of poverty and any extraneous individuals may be excluded from analysis.

4/ McKinney, John C., Constructive Typology and Social Theory, Appelton-Century-Crofts, New York: 1966, p. 3.

5/ Levy, op. cit., delineates three ideal types of family structure: extended, stem, and nuclear. However, for purposes here, the stem family would be considered as a form of the extended family.

6/ Riessman, Frank, "The Strengths of the Poor," in Shostak, Arthur B. and William Gomberg, Eds., New Perspectives on Poverty, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., Spectrum Books edition, 1965, p. 43.

7/ The terms, marriage or marital status, are avoided here since the degree of formalization of conjugal relationships is often extremely difficult to determine. Furthermore, it is somewhat irrelevant in the present case since the conjugal (and parental) role can be played regardless of legal formality. Therefore, a male and female in regular cohabitation are considered to be a conjugal pair and there will be no reference to marital status. The situation that may occur when a woman has one or more illegitimate children who with herself compose the family unit will be considered as a broken type here. Although

a permanent relationship may never have existed and, therefore, cannot be broken in the structural sense there is little difference between this and the case of a family where the father has died or moved out. (It is recognized, however, that there may be a considerable difference at the individual level in terms of psychological problems.)

8/ The nuclear-broken type is relevant only where there are children in the family unit since the dissolution of a conjugal relationship involving no children results in two single individuals who have no family relationships other than to their own families of orientation. The family of procreation, in its potential form, has been dissolved.

9/ The sex of family head distinction will not be invoked for extended families since these types have complexities which would make the dimension ambiguous, and therefore useless. In the extended family, the designation of head may be honorific as well as functional. (This can occur in nuclear families also but with considerably less probability.) For example, an 80 year old grandmother may be recognized as the head of the family but yet be its most dependent member. Thus, the sex of family head may not be relevant vis a vis the extended family.

10/ Riessman, op. cit.

11/ It is possible that a vertically extended family could occur in which all of the third generation were adults or in which none of the first generation were beyond 40 years of age; however, each such situation would be infrequent and a case where the third generation was adult and the first generation under 40 or even 50 years of age would be almost impossible to find.

12/ See for example Duvall, Evelyn Millis, Family Development, Chicago: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1957; and Glick, Paul, American Families, New York, John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1957.

13/ Theoretically, it would last as long as there was (a) potential for child bearing or (b) eligibility for the couple to adopt. Operationally, however, these threshholds must be approximated and age 45 for the female member of the pair is suggested as the arbitrary cutting point for this class. A conjugal pair who never had any children would move from the pre-child stage to the empty nest stage when the female passed age 45. There would be little difference in the situation of such a couple and one that had children who have all left the family environs.

14/ Two classification problems arise out of this operational distinction. First, it can be seen that a family may revert to the preschool children stage after being in the school children stage if a child is born or adopted after the previous youngest child enters school. Thus, the family cycle as viewed here is not a one-way developmental process but rather a compositional definition referring to only one point in time. Secondly, there may be instances where children do not enter school and this stage of the cycle may be

almost impossible to define. Mental retardation, physical infirmities or extreme mobility (such as the case of migrant farm laborers) are factors which cannot adequately be accounted for in the present paradigm using the family cycle concept. However, these special cases can be identified in the application of the family cycle paradigm and thus can be isolated for further analysis.

15/ Whether there is in fact a net reduction of parental responsibility at this point may be subject to argument here since there can be tremendous individual variation. Many parents continue to assume economic responsibilities toward children in college or to those who need a "start in life" and the increased social and economic needs of younger adults at this stage in life may actually create a net increase in their economic and social reliance on their parents. However, the relationships of the roles between parents and children and among other members of the family change considerably at this time resulting in a stage that is distinctly different from the previous stages and generally in the direction of increased independence.